RETHINKING ASYMMETRIC THREATS

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FOREWORD

Assessment of the threat environment is a critical element in the formulation of any state's strategy and defense doctrine. It also should be an inherently critical process that seeks to free policymakers from incorrect, antiquated, or misconceived perceptions about the threat. Consequently, the nature of the threat(s) the United States or any other government faces is the subject of a never-ending debate.

For several years U.S. policymakers, officials, and writers on defense have employed the terms "asymmetric" or "asymmetry" to characterize everything from the nature of the threats we face to the nature of war and beyond. This monograph challenges the utility of using those terms to characterize the threats we face, one element of the broader debate over the nature of war, U.S. strategy, and the threats confronting us. As a work of critique, it aims to make an important contribution to the threat debate. A correct assessment of the nature of the threat environment is essential to any sound defense doctrine for the U.S. Army and the military as a whole. That correct assessment can only be reached through a process of critique and debate. It is in that spirit that the Strategic Studies Institute presents this work to the defense and strategic community with the hope that it will contribute to the debate and help us reach better assessments of the overall strategic environment.

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STEPHEN J. BLANK has served as the Strategic Studies Institute's expert on the Soviet bloc and the post-Soviet world since 1989. Prior to that he was Associate Professor of Soviet Studies at the Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education, Maxwell Air Force Base, and taught at the University of Texas, San Antonio, and at the University of California, Riverside. Dr. Blank is the editor of *Imperial Decline: Russia's Changing Position in As*ia, coeditor of *Soviet Military and the Future,* and author of *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin's Commissariat of Nationalities, 1917-1924.* He has also written many articles and conference papers on Russian, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Eastern European security issues. Dr. Blank's current research deals with weapons proliferation and the revolution in military affairs, and energy and security in Eurasia. His most recent SSI publications include "The Foundations of Russian Strategic Power and Capabilities," in *Beyond Nunn-Lugar: Curbing the Next Wave of Weapons Proliferation Threats from Russi*a, edited by Henry D. Sokolski and Thomas Riisager, April 2002, and *The Transatlantic Security Agenda: A Conference Report and Analys*is, December 2001. Dr. Blank holds a B.A. in History from the University of Pennsylvania, and a M.A. and Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago.

SUMMARY

For the last several years, the U.S. strategic community has used the terms "asymmetric" and "asymmetry" to characterize everything from the threats we face to the wars we fight. In doing so, we have twisted these concepts beyond utility, particularly as they relate to the threats we face. As one writer cited here observed, we have reached the point where the German offensives of 1918 are considered asymmetric attacks. Clearly this use of the term asymmetric or of the concept of asymmetry does not help us assess correctly the threats we face. Indeed, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has voiced his discomfort with the term asymmetry, indicating his unease with its use. This monograph presents a substantive critique of those terms insofar as they relate to the threats, not to the nature of war or strategies that might be formulated against us.

In this critical attempt to "deconstruct" those terms, several critiques of them are presented that embrace what might be called linguistic as well as strategic challenges to the concept of asymmetric threats. What is at stake here is not just philological or philosophical exactitude, but rather getting the threat right. That is a critical strategic level responsibility of commanders and policymakers as they formulate policy and strategy. This monograph argues that our misuse of the terms asymmetry and asymmetric distorts those vital processes and leads us to make major strategic blunders. For example by focusing on threats rather than enemy strategies we fail to understand their strategic nature, goals, and overall concepts of operations. Clearly something like this happened on September 11, 2001, where we suffered grievously for our failure to understand the nature of the terrorists' strategy and hence the real threats they could pose. We had concentrated instead on what are called here tactical level threats, not a strategic threat to the existence of our national command authority or financial system.

But beyond simply criticizing the misuse of the terms relating to asymmetry and asymmetric threats, this monograph presents an alternative way of thinking about the kinds of threats we face from both states and nonstate actors in the contemporary strategic environment. It argues that threats should be categorized on

the basis of the significance of the target. In that case the threats displayed on September 11, 2001, would clearly be recognized as strategic, while attacks like those on the USS *Cole* in Yemen a year earlier would be seen as tactical level. We do not disparage the seriousness of the latter event or of other similar cases, but rather we gain a better and more accurate perception of a threat environment that is now multidimensional, can be launched from anywhere on earth, or, in the not too distant future, from space. Threats also can be launched from underwater to space and vice versa, or through the ether, land, sea, air, underwater, and from space to any of the other media enumerated here. These threats, both strategic and tactical, comprise traditional anti-access strategies along with proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and potential information warfare. Indeed, foreign military analysts believe that, in some cases, their countries have already been subjected to these new forms of threats. They also cite the possibility that the new technologies coming into being could lead to innovative and unprecedented fusions of information and biological warfare.

This assessment of the broader threat environment suggests that the Bush administration has grasped correctly that the strategic environment it inherited has changed, dramatically and substantively. Indeed, that environment might have been changing in this direction even without the attacks of September 11. In such a dramatically transformed strategic environment, not only must our forces and organizations be transformed, so too must our thinking undergo transformation. And transformation of our thinking about the nature of the threat environment confronting us is essential to the development of a sound defense strategy and policy, and operational concepts that will prevent future defeats and contribute to the ensuring victory in forthcoming contingencies.

RETHINKING ASYMMETRIC THREATS

Introduction.

This monograph aims to improve the way we think about threats to U.S. security and interests, and consequently about our enemies' strategies. It attempts to clarify our thinking so we may better understand those challenges and the strategies of which they are a part. Reconceptualizing the threats we face is important because as our thinking about potential enemies becomes sharper, the responses and strategies that we can then devise should also become sharper. Then our responses to threats would be more likely to attain either lasting victory in war or enduring deterrence of threats.

This work analyzes the concept of "asymmetric threats." It suggests that continuing to use that concept or the related notion of "asymmetry" with regard to threat assessment (not strategy) impedes clear thinking and sound strategic planning thereby complicating our commanders' and leaders' jobs. And by confusing us or leading us astray concerning threats to our interests and the strategies that comprise them, the use of these terms heightens the risk that we may fail to understand and then overcome our enemies. Instead, we should return to classifying threats flowing from asymmetric enemies and their equally asymmetric strategies or war plans on the basis of their scope and magnitude, or to their effect upon us. This would mean reserving the terms "asymmetry" and "asymmetric" for the actual conduct of a war, our enemies, and their strategies. Obviously, the asymmetric strategies directed against us comprise numerous and diverse threats. But while the strategy and our enemies may be asymmetric to our strategies and forces, the threats may or may not be. Moreover, threats to our security are generally not mounted strictly for their own sake without any kind of strategic planning or objective in mind. Rather they are invariably part of a strategy, misguided or not. Therefore, calling both threats and strategies asymmetric at the same time means falling into one of the oldest of epistemological fallacies, namely substituting the part for the whole.

For example, the use of a contemporary version of shore batteries

to thwart an American strategy based on forward presence may be part of a larger asymmetric strategy for waging the overall war. This kind of deployment is often known as an anti-access strategy or as part of such a strategy. But anti-access strategies date back centuries and, strategically speaking, are a perfectly symmetrical response to a fundamental postulate of U.S. strategy, namely our efforts to secure forward presence in combat theaters. Moreover, as recent testimony on intelligence before Congress underscores, this anti-access strategy is increasingly likely to be carried out using relatively high-tech and modern weaponry: cruise missiles, submarines, mines, long-range interdiction and denial technologies, as well as possibly weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Indeed, some authorities go beyond calling this an anti-access or sea denial strategy to labeling it an area denial strategy "whose defeat or negation will become the single most crucial element in projecting and sustaining U.S. military power where it's needed." And it is acknowledged that the use of such weapons, especially WMD, can frustrate American planning.[1]

Therefore, to avoid using terms relating to asymmetry for designating threats, this monograph suggests reclassifying threats to our interests, forces, homeland, and allies according to their effect or the magnitude of their impact upon us. In that context, a threat commensurate with what happened on September 11, 2001, would be labeled a strategic threat, whereas the attack on the USS *Cole* in Yemen in October 2000 would be of a lesser magnitude, i.e., a tactical threat, even though both were terrorist operations and part of a broader and clearly articulated asymmetric strategy.

Refining our thinking about future war and the pursuit of greater clarity about it before having to wage it is essential. As the U.S. military well understands, our current technological superiority cannot be taken for granted. As NATO advisor Chris Donnelly recently observed, "technological advantage is always transient."[2] And as the Joint Chiefs of Staff stated in *Joint Vision 2020* (henceforth JV 2020),

> We will not necessarily sustain a wide technological advantage over our adversaries in all areas. Increased availability of commercial satellites, digital communications, and the public Internet all give adversaries new capabilities at a relatively low

> cost. We should not expect opponents in 2020 to fight with strictly "industrial age" tools [indeed al-Qaida in 2000-01 had already proven quite adept at using the new technologies listed above - author]. Our advantage must, therefore, come from leaders, people, doctrine, organizations, and training that enable us to take advantage of technology to achieve superior warfighting effectiveness.[3]

Asymmetric Threats: The Argument.

Over the last 7 years, the words "asymmetry" and "asymmetric" have become vogue words in American strategic and political science discourse. The use of these words pervades discussions of contemporary war, and they have become central concepts of American discourse on war. And they are used indiscriminately in those discussions. Wars, enemies, battles, strategies, "approaches," options, challenges, and many other phenomena related to armed conflict have all been labeled as "asymmetric," often in the same work.[4] However, here we will confine our analysis of the utility of this term and the related concept of asymmetry to threats and their assessment. The use of terms relating to asymmetry is especially prominent in official and unofficial threat assessments published by the Pentagon, intelligence agencies, independent analyses here and abroad, and/or major independent commissions. Often those works use these terms to describe virtually every aspect of the military opposition we will confront.[5] Official statements, reports, independent studies, and the publications of these commissions have increasingly postulated that the main threats confronting the United States, its armed forces, interests, and allies are asymmetrical ones, even though the nature of that asymmetry is more often than not postulated rather than analyzed. Likewise, in media discussions of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the concepts of asymmetry and asymmetrical threat have been repeatedly invoked. In other words, the terms "asymmetric" and "asymmetry" have become mantras or slogans that are trotted out for any and all occasions but which have been devoid of useful analytical content. As one recent analysis of asymmetric threats sharply observes, current definitions could even include the German offensive of 1918 as an asymmetric approach.[6]

These terms obscure understanding more than they enlighten, having become politicized rather than being truly analytical.

In contemporary writings, asymmetric threats generally include terrorism, unconventional or guerrilla tactics or guerrilla warfare as has been attempted in Iraq and Afghanistan, the use of WMD, cyber-warfare, or information war (IW). More recently, the use of cruise and/or ballistic missiles, and other weapons to fashion an anti-access or area denial strategy to include, in some cases, urban warfare, have been embraced as asymmetric threats.[7] These definitions may also include weapon systems and technologies dedicated to defeating our precision strike and engagement capabilities. Therefore they are also called counterprecision-engagement capabilities or threats. Capabilities designed to neutralize our ability to use space for military purposes, i.e., counterspace strategies, may soon be considered among them as well.[8] Furthermore, as the United States prepared for war against Iraq, newspaper reports related U.S. assessments that Iraq planned to retaliate with an entire panoply of so-called asymmetric strategies: chemical and biological warfare, urban warfare, and a "scorched earth strategy," among others.[9]

We must note that many of these asymmetric threats are quite often long-standing ones. For example, cruise and ballistic missiles were first used by the Nazis in the V-1 and V-2 missile attacks upon London in 1944-45. As a U.S. Army War College study observes, asymmetry is a new word for an old term whose provenance goes back to Sun Tzu's "all warfare is based on deception," through Liddell Hart's "indirect approach" to Edward Luttwak's "paradoxical logic of strategy."[10]

Undoubtedly the idea of avoiding enemy strengths while probing for their weaknesses and maximizing our own advantages is hardly revolutionary. As Dr. Steven Metz of the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) has written, that is a "core logic" of all competitive endeavors.[11] So, if asymmetric means doing what you do best while the enemy cannot match you in that particular line of activity, it is hardly a useful analytic concept.

At the same time, the use of the term "asymmetric" to denote both contemporary wars and threats poses a host of problems. As Metz and Dr. Douglas Johnson of SSI also point out, the term "asymmetry" has truly multiple dimensions. At the strategic level, they equate

it essentially to acting, organizing, and thinking differently than one's opponents in order to maximize one's own advantages, exploit enemy weaknesses, attain the initiative, or obtain more freedom of action. Several other treatises on asymmetric threats that deal with this question also use the term in this manner.[12] Given this multiplicity of dimensions and possible usages of the terms "asymmetry" and "asymmetric," it soon becomes clear that employing these words and concepts to describe threats rather than strategies creates many problems for commanders, leaders, and analysts alike. Indeed, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has publicly stated his unhappiness with the term.[13]

Asymmetry must mean more than "simply making maximum use of one's advantages" or fighting differently than we do for this concept to possess utility for strategic planners in understanding their enemies and their own forces and strategies. In that case, for example, if we use the 1999 Joint Strategy Review's terminology that says that asymmetric approaches are usable at all levels of warfare to "circumvent or undermine U.S. strengths while exploiting U.S. weaknesses, using methods that significantly differ from the United States' expected method of operations," the approach, as Lawrence Freedman writes, "becomes synonymous with any sound strategy for fighting the United States and loses any specificity."[14] In fact, those definitions are tautologies. Lest we have to undergo another painful, time-consuming, and exhaustive process with regard to contemporary threats and the strategies behind them, conceptual clarity concerning asymmetry is needed. Indeed, it is essential to the attainment of decisive victories that leave behind the opportunity for realizing what Liddell Hart called "a better peace."

Asymmetric Threats, Definitional and Strategic Problems.

To achieve this conceptual clarity, we must first try to get at the roots of the way the terms "asymmetry" or "asymmetric" are used with regard to threat assessment.[15] One recent study, for example, finds that the terms "asymmetry" and "asymmetric" as they relate to warfare in general, not just threats, may have political utility but are of diminishing value for analysts and for commanders. This study concluded that:

> Indeed, "asymmetric warfare" and "asymmetric threats" seem to be formless and shifting concepts, insofar as attempts to use them to understand and analyze the security environment can be like grabbing sand out of a barrel. You know that you have grabbed something of substance, but there is not nearly so much there as you first felt once you removed your hand from the barrel. You also observe that the substance itself is ever remolding its shape, even as you hold it in your hand.[16]

In "deconstructing" these terms, we find at least nine reasons for concern that using the concept of "asymmetry" to describe or assess threats is problematic. First, because the words "asymmetry" and "asymmetric" possess several meanings in English; when we use them, they may not mean the same thing to us as to our audience. Second, it is therefore quite possible that even official documents may not be using "asymmetric" correctly, according to any of those meanings or that officials have different understandings of what those terms mean. So in both these cases, we may simply be confusing ourselves and our own people. Third, this word does not translate well into the languages of putative military rivals, e.g., China and Russia. Therefore it may mislead more than clarify foreign audiences. Likewise, when we translate foreign military thinking and thereby assimilate it by translating what may be other concepts as "asymmetry" or related words we may be misleading ourselves as to foreign doctrines and strategies.[17] This is an example of the well-known problem of "mirror-imaging" in all analysis of foreign governments and cultures.

Fourth, the terms "asymmetry" and "asymmetric" may and can easily come to comprise virtually every difference between two militaries from the tactical to the strategic levels and thus lose any meaningful utility for analysis of specific threats and strategies. This is exactly what has happened when it comes to mean simply exploiting what you do best against what your enemy does not do so well. Since no two armies duplicate each other in their quality across the spectrum of their performance tasks, structure, tactics, strategy, doctrine, leadership, and objectives, their wartime relationship is inherently asymmetrical to some extent. As a result, commanders now say that an asymmetric threat must be met "with some degree

of asymmetry."[18] Though the general meaning of such statements is clear, the usage of the term asymmetry in this way muddies the waters. This usage of the relevant terms ultimately obscures rather than clarifies what is important. Simply listing the adversary as asymmetric to the United States leads us away from the necessary but difficult job of thinking as to what that means, the risks it entails, and the opportunities that asymmetry presents to us.

Fifth, since many writers on defense issues regularly define almost every kind of conflict as asymmetric, defining threats to our forces or interests as such is already implicit in the description of the larger phenomenon. This trend inverts the epistemological fallacy noted above because the part (threat) is implicit in the definition of the larger whole (the conflict at hand) from the start, and this fact need not be repeated as it will only confuse the issue and lead people to emphasize the threat over the strategy. Since the interaction of two enemies is almost always an inherently asymmetric relationship, it follows that the enemy is inherently asymmetric to us. Thus arguing that the potential of asymmetric approaches is perhaps the most serious danger we face in the immediate future, as did JV 2020, does not mean what it might be thought to mean. In fact, American thinking about asymmetry evinced clear preferences for situating the term in all its uses within very familiar scenarios.[19] And because of the inherent asymmetry of war and of strategy, an enemy's threats against U.S. forces are asymmetric to us just as our threats are to him. Moreover, as we shall see below, American writers readily understand that we are also asymmetric to our enemies and, therefore, should conduct asymmetric strategies against them.[20]

This asymmetry of enemies to each other could assume numerous forms: e.g., a transnational terrorist organization versus a state, or two adversaries of widely differing capabilities, as with Iraq. Accordingly, each side's strategy, operations, and thus threats to each other will be asymmetric to those of the other side throughout the duration of the war. Furthermore, in many contemporary wars the asymmetries between the enemies are apparent from the outset, e.g., Yugoslavia's wars, or Afghanistan's civil war, or the Palestinian Intifadas. Therefore, calling those ethnic or religious wars asymmetrical ones merely restates the obvious. It necessarily follows, then, that because

each side's strategy and objectives are inherently asymmetric to each other, each side's tactics and the threats that it poses to the other will also partake of this asymmetry. Under those circumstances calling threats asymmetrical is meaningless.[21]

A sixth reason why the term "asymmetric" with regard to threats fails to fully clarify our understanding of the strategic situation is suggested by the foregoing analysis. Using that term leads us to emphasize the threat rather than the operation and strategy of which it is a larger part. This relates back to the epistemological fallacy cited previously of substituting the part for the whole. The enemy's strategy and/or operations may be truly asymmetrical to our methodical application of power in a conventional war scenario, e.g., the resort to a comprehensive and protracted strategy of terrorism that goes far beyond isolated incidents. Losing sight of strategy while focusing on threats then causes us to lose sight of the forest for the tree or the trees. Concentrating on the asymmetrical threat actually diverts attention away from the more critical asymmetrical strategy or operational planning which has a much greater importance for the war as a whole. We can reasonably expect that an adversary employing a strategy of terrorism will not employ conventional threats or do so only to magnify the impact of terror attacks.

Given his preceding choice of an asymmetric strategy, his tactics will inevitably reflect that asymmetry and need not be called such again so that we focus on the strategy and on defeating it, rather than on threats and countering them. But to emphasize threats over strategies or operational concepts deprives commanders of the incentive and opportunity to focus on strategic and/or operational level asymmetries from which threats may then flow. That process leads us to regard with insufficient seriousness the genuinely strategic threats that may menace us based on the preexisting asymmetry between us and our enemies. Thus we evidently did not regard either al-Qaida's strategic objectives or the fact that it loudly proclaimed itself to be at war with us sufficiently seriously even though there was a rising awareness of potentially imminent threats after 1998. This was because we focused on the individual threat rather than on the broader strategic factors that governed al-Qaida's way of thinking and acting.[22] Ultimately we focused on tactics and

tactical engagements, not operations and strategy to the point where the kind of terrorism that struck us on September 11, and which was part of a war launched by al-Qaida as far back as 1992-93, was not recognized by us as war.[23]

Seventh, the very word, "asymmetric" presents difficulties which quickly become apparent when one starts to apply it systematically. Once we start "deconstructing" the terms "asymmetry" or "asymmetric" and ask the question asymmetric to what, those terms' utility breaks down. The words "asymmetric" and "asymmetry" imply a relational quality whereby one structure or unit of design is opposed to another and is designated as being strikingly different from it. In that situation the unit that is not called asymmetric is taken to be the established or desired, i.e., the symmetrical template of that unit of design. Consequently, when we say that the threats we face are asymmetric ones, we postulate the U.S. military doctrine and strategy not only as the most powerful and technologically advanced one in the world, which is factually true, but also as the templates for all other states and kinds of wars. Thus the U.S. armed forces' organization, doctrine, and tactics are inherently assumed to be the sole model of the correct approach to issues of contemporary war and defense. This implies that America alone possesses the truth about warfare and has a generically correct or sound template for waging war in general based on its technological superiority and progress in consummating the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). Furthermore this template is or should be acknowledged universally as the standard against which all other militaries and strategies must compete.

It follows, then, that the significance of the term "asymmetric" with regard to any conflict lies in its utility in explaining first a strategic situation or relationship and second how either or both sides should aim to convert that preexisting asymmetry into an enduring strategic advantage. The critical question to ask when confronted with a threat assessment listing "asymmetric" threats is asymmetric to what? If we take the phenomena listed in most official or quasi-official statements of the administration and our military leadership as constituting asymmetric threats, it soon becomes clear that it is very hard to answer this question effectively. For example,

we used cruise missiles against al-Qaida in 1998, and they were widely regarded then and subsequently in Kosovo and since as almost standard weapons of war for America. How can we then say that other states' or enemies' use of them or, for that matter, ballistic missiles with conventional warheads would be asymmetrical? Where is the asymmetry in that case? Anti-access threats like mines or layered land-based defenses that are essentially modern versions of shore artillery are hardly asymmetrical ones if we face an enemy determined to counter our fleet's ability to dominate naval theaters. Indeed, Iran, often mentioned as such a potential enemy, has clearly directed most of its defense spending in the last decade to acquire those capabilities of naval and air power that would deny us access to its shores.[24] Moreover, our own public intelligence assessments indicate that Iran actually could block the Straits of Hormuz for a few days to either commercial or military naval traffic.[25] Certainly Iran is responding, not asymmetrically but, if anything, symmetrically to our threat and power projection capability. Iran's newly acquired capabilities, and China's, too, for that matter, are exactly the kind of counters to our strategy which depends upon ensuring the forward presence that one would expect.[26] Thus one can say quite credibly that the capabilities that these potential adversaries are acquiring are "Newtonian" threats, i.e., equal and opposing threats to our strategy that relies heavily on forward presence.

Finally, we may discern two other problems with the way in which we invoke asymmetric threats and asymmetry in general: the eighth and ninth problems raised by the loose use of the term asymmetric with regard to threats. The eighth concern is that, given our lead and mentality, we are, in fact, asymmetric to the rest of the world, many of whose militaries, capabilities, and doctrines resemble each other's more than they do ours.[27] Indeed, to read foreign military commentary on the U.S. strategy and operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, e.g., Russian commentary, gives one the strong impression that Moscow's analysts inside the armed forces and its intelligence organs simply cannot begin to imagine warfare as we do. As a result they have consistently misinformed their topmost leadership which has then taken political positions that have exacted severe costs upon Russian foreign policy. Moreover,

their political leaders have chastised them for these faulty forecasts and assessments.[28]

We fully intend to extend our asymmetry vis-à-vis the world's other militaries and widen the gap in capability between U.S. forces and other possible challengers to our interests. Indeed, we say so openly. The U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM) states this in discussing its showcase concept of rapid decisive operations (RDO).

> RDO will integrate knowledge, command, and control, and effects-based operations to achieve the desired political-military effect. In preparing for and conducting a rapid decisive operation, the military acts in concert with and leverages the other instruments of national power to understand and reduce the regional adversary's critical capabilities and coherence. The United States and its allies asymmetrically assault the adversary from directions and in dimensions against which he has no counter, dictating the terms and tempos of the operation. The adversary, suffering from the loss of coherence and unable to achieve his objectives, chooses to cease actions that are against U.S. interests or has his capabilities defeated.[29]

Whatever else one may say about this guidance, we saw something like it in Iraq and it also makes the point that we intend to execute asymmetric strategies. Or, as former Vice-Admiral Arthur Cebrowski (USN Ret.) and Thomas Barnett observe,

> In short, the rise of asymmetrical warfare is largely our own creation. We are creating the mismatch in means as we increasingly extend the reach of our warfighting machine down the range of conflict—past the peer competitor, past the rogue nationstate, right down to individual enemy combatants. This constitutes in itself an amazing transformation of the American way of war over the past generation.[30]

This is not a unique observation shared only by a few. Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Cain, the editor of Air University's *Air & Space Power Journal*, writes that,

> We tend to forget, however, that our asymmetric air and space power advantages place virtually every country in an insoluble quandary with respect to U.S. power and the exercise of national sovereignty.[31]

Yet he laments that this "expanding asymmetry" ironically may not work to enhance our security because enemies will shun conflicts with us where our asymmetries can be decisive. Instead, they will seek strategies designed to negate the technological and organizational competency of our air and space forces.[32] In other words, because we possess inherently asymmetrical capabilities vis-à-vis almost everyone else, they will be driven to pursue asymmetrical strategies against us that negate those advantages. In fact, recent war games confirm this and show that our adversaries are prepared, under the right conditions, even to launch nuclear first-strikes and preemptive strikes against us to deny us access to the theater, thereby offsetting our overwhelming conventional advantages which are magnified under a U.S. doctrine of preemptiion.[33] But if we are asymmetric to everyone else, our enemies' threats would, as stated above, be subsumed as asymmetric vis-à-vis the United States because their larger strategy would be an asymmetric one that encompassed such threats within it.

However, if we are the source of asymmetrical warfare due to this overwhelming, and as these sources intimate, clearly invincible template, how then can such warfare be an asymmetric threat against us? In making these kinds of assertions and labels about threats to our interests and values we display the conceptual confusions and shoddy thinking that beset the whole concept of asymmetric threats. After all, if we are fighting asymmetrically against everyone else, our enemies' strategies will also be inherently asymmetric.

The aspiration towards total dominance across the spectrum of conflict and the acknowledgement that we are as asymmetric as our adversary are not merely functions of our defense policy's rightful ambition to field forces that can defeat all challengers. As the *Quadrennial Defense Review* 2001 (QDR) states in its foreword:

> Adopting this capabilities-based approach to planning requires that the nation maintain its military advantages in key areas while it develops new areas of military advantage and denies asymmetric advantages to adversaries. It entails adapting existing military capabilities to new circumstances, while experimenting with the development of new military capabilities. In short, it requires the transformation of U.S. forces, capabilities, and institutions to extend America's asymmetric advantages well into

the future.[34]

Accordingly, we ourselves will use the asymmetries that work to our advantage when we go into battle against any and all enemies, undoubtedly reflecting our aspiration to full spectrum dominance. As the aforementioned definition of RDO states, American forces would asymmetrically assault an enemy's forces from directions against which he has "no counter." This sentence implies that RDO can occur only in asymmetric ways and will never take place against an adversary that possesses an asymmetric "counter," however limited. This discussion of the terminology surrounding asymmetry and asymmetric war indicates that the evolution of the usage of these and related terms has led to a situation where "gradually the concept has been deprived of useful meaning."[35]

Ninth, our own approach, whatever we call it, is itself a response to specific American circumstances as much as it is a reply to a universal technological and military revolution. Therefore its universal applicability is open to question. The RMA and IW, at least in theory, provide opportunities to achieve the following objectives. We can wage war rapidly at great distance by achieving air and electronic superiority as a leveraging force, sustain minimal casualties and hopefully also limit "collateral damage" to overcome domestic and foreign opposition, if not unrest, due to high casualties and protracted war. We can also avoid protracted war at all costs, replace the politically costly system of conscription and its associated manpower costs with technology to make up the increasing shortfall between *our* growing responsibilities and constrained defense budgets, and restrict the media's ability to portray the war other than as *our* leadership want it portrayed.[36] Finally, this approach also forces us to fight only short wars lest domestic support be found wanting. As the 1997 *National Military Strategy* stated,

> Everything is staked on a short, decisive war. As a global power with worldwide interests, it is imperative that the United States be able to deter and defeat nearly simultaneous, large-scale, cross-border aggression in two distant theaters in overlapping time frames, preferably in concert with regional allies. . . . In this regard, a particularly challenging requirement associated with fighting and winning major theater wars is being able to rapidly

> defeat initial enemy advances short of their objectives in two theaters in close succession, one followed almost immediately by another. Maintaining this capability is absolutely critical to our ability to seize the initiative in both theaters and minimize the amount of territory we and our allies must regain from aggressors. Failure to halt an enemy invasion rapidly would make the subsequent campaign to evict enemy forces from captured territory much more difficult, lengthy, and costly. Such failure would also weaken coalition support, undermine U.S. credibility, and increase the risk of conflict elsewhere.[37]

Although the two theater requirement has been abandoned by the Bush administration as a template for planning, no doubt the word "elsewhere" should also include the home front since strategic failure at the level hinted at above would immediately trigger a massive public and congressional outcry against our leadership.[38] Because contemporary and future war shatters the difference between front and rear, approaches three-dimensional warfare, and probably will be a coalition war, it is also likely to spread and encompass multiple theaters of war or be global as is the global war on terrorism (GWOT). We cannot count on a rapid end to such a war. Hence our vulnerability to a form of war that deliberately seeks prolongation and our consequent disorientation.

At the same time, the demand for a rapid war is also a demand for one in which nothing can go wrong and for which the military will be blamed for whatever went wrong or for the constraints imposed upon it by the Administration in power. While those constraints may or may not be misguided; the desire to be insulated from the blame if things go wrong relates more to civil-military politics and relations in the United States than it does to universal or timeless strategic considerations. A recent article in *The Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute* expressed this jaundiced view of civilian-military relationships and its justification for RDOs by stating that,

> The reality is that in Vietnam U.S. servicemen and women were ordered into combat for a cause that their senior-most leaders—most notably Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara—had already given up on and there was no open revolt of the admirals and generals. *Shadows from this tarnished image of leadership will not disappear in an era when U.S. forces are being committed* to *less-vital*

> *interventions in* a *piecemeal fashion by leaders who appear unsure and not ready* to *stay the course.* The Weinberger-Powell doctrine may have brushed aside these shadows for a while, but they are slowly growing back.[39] (Original emphasis)

In other words, the RMA and IW are believed to promise us a way to overcome what many military men believed were the reasons for our loss in Vietnam and also to revolutionize warfare to our advantage.

Given the hidden and not so hidden domestic taproots of our approach to war, we cannot, in fact, universalize our template to make it effective at all times and places. Thus we have already begun to encounter immense friction and fog with regard to wars that we are fighting and have fought, i.e., the war on terrorism and the war against Iraq, not to mention the current crisis with North Korea. And this does not even begin to discuss the bureaucratic friction within our government. The widely acknowledged existence of those interdepartmental struggles confirm that friction exists despite the RMA and does so exactly where Clausewitz first located it, within the bureaucracy and then the coalitions against Napoleon.[40]

Strategic Ethnocentrism.

These nine concerns about employing the concept of asymmetry to depict the threats that we now or will face betray as well an unsettling strategic ethnocentrism, an increasingly articulated belief that we alone have the answers. Many critics of American strategy have challenged it on that basis, and there can be no doubt that at least some of our official statements of strategy lend force to those critiques. For example, the new *National Security Strategy* (NSS) unfortunately falls into this trap at its very start by stating that,

> The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.[41]

This statement and its underlying mentality constitute a prime example of strategic ethnocentrism in action, and this hubris invites or risks a commensurate retribution. This monistic mentality also assumes there is only one truth and model for warfare, and that we

alone have it. It also appears in a 1998 National Defense University Study which defines asymmetric warfare as follows:

> Put simply, asymmetric threats or techniques are a version of not "fighting fair," which can include the use of surprise in all its operational and strategic dimensions and the use of weapons in ways unplanned by the United States. Not fighting fair also includes the prospect of an opponent designing a strategy that fundamentally alters the terrain on which a conflict is fought.[42]

The arrogance, naiveté, and ultimately the pathos of this outlook are striking, even breathtaking. Arguably as well, such thinking and monistic, mechanistic, stereotypical responses to the world of military conflict are auguries of disaster or at least of unnecessary suffering. Certainly this kind of outlook almost invites the opponent to preempt and thus surprise us, either at the tactical level, or, as on September 11, at the strategic and operational levels. And, in fact, this has been the case despite our victories, for reports of the GWOT are full of complaints about an insufficiency of intelligence, precisely the area where our template tells us we are most superior, i.e., information dominance of the theater. Indeed, as Secretary Rumsfeld told Congress, "our intelligence has repeatedly underestimated the weapons capability of countries of major concern to us."[43] Worse yet as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers confirmed, the enemy in Afghanistan has adapted to our method of warfare faster than we have adapted to his actions.[44] The enemy's speedier adaptation to an evolving strategic situation hardly shows our template to be more effective in providing for victory or in exploiting the asymmetries that work to our benefit.

Thus even before the guns are fired, this way of thinking about war invites conceptual confusion and misdirection. And because we have failed to understand the enemy as an inherently asymmetric strategic actor, we have not been able to convert our own asymmetrical advantages in Afghanistan into lasting stability. Thus our victory there remains incomplete, and multiple signs exist of the reconstitution of the Taliban from disaffected former allies or surviving members, along with suspicions of Pakistan's unwillingness to suppress recruitment and sanctuaries in Pakistan

and even of Russia's financial support for the reconstituted Taliban.[45] These failures are particularly striking, for a pillar of American military strategy and doctrine is that our forces are configured for full spectrum dominance and for information superiority.[46] If that is the case, no threat or strategy is or should be asymmetric to our forces or capabilities; nor can opposing strategies be called asymmetric because we supposedly can and do compete successfully across the spectrum of military threat. Allegedly our forces, according to official thinking, can adapt to any enemy strategy and counter it effectively or must be able to do so. Since we can understand what the enemy is up to, we also can adapt to retain or regain superiority. Hence, no enemy strategy can be truly asymmetric in its ultimate manifestation. And if that holds for strategies, it certainly holds for enemy threats as well.

Therefore, labeling threats as asymmetric under those circumstances implicitly concedes the fact that we are either not prepared for some very real contingencies, in terms of operational planning, or intelligence, or information dominance or that we adapt slowly and poorly to changing operational realities as Myers suggested.[47] Hence this labeling process suggests a cognitive or doctrinal unpreparedness that could be highly detrimental, if not lethal. Despite our efforts to proclaim ourselves "masters of the universe" and assert our readiness for all comers, in fact, as Immanuel Kant observed, "reality is not adapted to our capabilities of cognition." Thus employing terms like "asymmetric" to describe threats also constitutes an implicit or covert confession that we do not understand or do not want to fight certain kinds of wars or undertake actions needed to wage them, especially where that includes learning from the past and/or departing from our preferred template.[48] Indeed, one may argue, as does Roger Barnett, that "true asymmetries, in contrast, are *those actions that an adversary can exercise that you either cannot or will not*."[49] (Italics in the original.) Hence asymmetric strategies and the threats they encompass go beyond either our capabilities of cognition or of action. Thus as he observes, terrorism, a form of asymmetric strategy, if not warfare, goes beyond or *outside the limits imposed on the use of force.*"[50] (Italics in the original.)

The tendency to neglect the lessons of Vietnam on how to combine forms of warfare against us that transcended our cognitive capabilities is very suggestive here.[51] Certainly the idea that we alone have got it right or that the way in which we use our superior power ensures a preferred strategic outcome is not borne out by examination of either other militaries' performance or our recent military history, e.g., Kosovo or Haiti. Even in Iraq, the real test of American strategy is not the outstanding battlefield performance of our forces, but our ability to leave behind a stable, secure, and democratic Iraq. Otherwise a brilliant operational plan will have led to strategic frustration; and at present that outcome is in doubt. Thus more acknowledgement of the need for strategic learning from others would greatly benefit us.

The ingrained tendency to denigrate or depreciate the fact that we are fighting an armed forces and government or movement that has its own cultural referents concerning war, for example different senses of time and motion, could lead to serious losses. Indeed, everything Saddam Hussein was reported to be doing until the fighting started and much of what was thought to be Iraqi strategy looked like a textbook adaptation of how to execute so called "asymmetric" strategies.[52] And, of course, the fighting since April 2003 immediately brings that description to mind. Certainly Saddam's prewar actions obstructed the administration's plans to wage a preventive war against him by depriving us of key strategic instruments of such a war: allied support, legitimacy stemming from UN resolutions, guaranteed forward presence in Turkey and Saudi Arabia, etc. And evidently his guidelines to his people are still functioning to deprive us of post-conflict retrospective legitimacy and stability.[53]

Other warnings about our ethnocentrism and tendency to rely on a single model are also in order. Since we define our conduct of war in its entirety as the model against which others should be measured, we also claim that the model of contemporary operations is or should be one where rapid operations leading to a decisive end are an essential and indispensable attribute of victory.[54] This insistence pervades our official military literature as well as much independent analysis of U.S. strategy, operations, etc.[55] However,

it can leave us in a situation where, if speed of operations fails to achieve a victory, we then have no idea how to fight except to repeat what will then become "cookbook warfare" (much like the Soviets in Afghanistan). Since we seem to be insisting on what Hans Delbruck called an annihilation strategy (*Vernichtungskrieg*) against "rogue states," if that fails we often have no idea of what to do next. Thus in Kosovo it is arguable that it was Russia's threat to Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to "defect" to NATO that convinced him to give in, not just our bombing campaign and certainly not the threat of a ground operation against him by NATO.[56] Far too much of the commentary leading up to the war in Iraq took it for granted, against all sensible military thinking and experience, that this war would be "a cakewalk."[57] Yet from the inception of our pressure upon Saddam Hussein, it rapidly became clear that our strategy would encounter various forms of attrition warfare that we find difficult to master. Indeed, it took over a year of tough political trench warfare for the administration to launch the war. Consequently we are in danger of becoming like the chess player with a single prepared variation. When his opponent, recognizing this, takes him (or us) "out of the books," he becomes disoriented and lost. We, too, could become equally vulnerable to this kind of military process.

Similarly we need to understand that it is not so much threats that are asymmetrical. Rather, it would perhaps be more precise and possibly even more instructive to use the term asymmetric with respect to strategies and enemies. As British writer Christopher Bellamy observes,

> All conflict is asymmetric to some extent and the clever combatant has always exploited asymmetry. The term 'asymmetric,' like any other new buzzword, has always been subject to widespread misunderstanding. If one side has an advantage in numbers and quality, or moral, physical, or conceptual superiority in certain areas—as the Allies did in the 1991 Gulf War—that does not make the conflict "asymmetric' in the true sense. Whatever differences there may be in numbers and quality, conventional military forces are still designed, trained, and equipped to fight near mirror images of themselves; forces with broadly similar infrastructures. A true asymmetric conflict is where not only the means used but the ends, and vulnerabilities, are quite different.

> Turning the adversary's advantages against them—as Al Qaida (it is assumed) did with horrific brilliance on 11 September is a hallmark of asymmetric conflict.[58]

Since asymmetry is an intrinsic element of strategy, speaking in such terms helps us to avoid the mistakes of an excessively ethnocentric approach to war and to thinking about it. "Asymmetry" and related derivative terms should be confined to ends, not means, strategy, not tactics or threats. This is because an asymmetric strategy, as Barnett suggests, is one that essentially surpasses and confounds our strategic imagination, taking us "out of the books." As a Rand Corporation study pointed out,

> Asymmetric strategies attack vulnerabilities not appreciated by the "target" (victim) or capitalize on the victim's limited preparation against the threat These strategies rely (primarily, but not exclusively) on CONOPs (concepts of operations) that are fundamentally different from the victim's and/or from those of recent history. They often employ new or different weapons. Additionally they can serve political or strategic objectives that are not the same as those the victim pursues.[59]

For example, our own strategy in the 1991 Gulf War was asymmetrical to Iraq's because Saddam expected a very different kind of war from us than what we gave him even though both sides fought a theater conventional war. And it appears that in 2003 we again chose a course of action that was asymmetric to Saddam's and most foreign observers' assumptions and thereby obtained tactical, if not operational and strategic, surprise, as well as the initiative throughout the operation. In this respect, we fulfilled the requirement of RDO which calls for striking at the enemy asymmetrically and using our advantages asymmetrically.[60]

Thus if our template of war emphasizes rapid conventional war combined with CONOPS intended to annihilate enemy forces speedily and through the exploitation of asymmetries in our favor, asymmetric enemies or enemies employing an asymmetric strategy will act to confound our concepts of time, victory, and our CONOPS in general. We must recognize the challenge to understand our enemies' strategic culture and proceed accordingly. Thomas Hughes,

writing in the Air Force's *Aerospace Power Journal,* emphasized that,

> Evidence of time's physical and cultural determinants should worry those responsible for the nation's defense. The Pentagon's decree for speed across all levels of war commits a cardinal sin of strategy by assuming a consistent value of velocity between ally and adversary. This decree ignores cultural variety regarding time, and in the process, strategists dismiss their own exhortations of the dangers of mirror-imaging enemies. In making speed a mandated weapon in its repertoire, the Pentagon makes patience an asymmetric threat in the quivers of those who wait out an impulsive America.[61]

Echoing this approach and critique, Jacob Kipp and Lester Grau of the U.S. Army's Foreign Military Studies Office at Fort Leavenworth write,

> Most of the arguments in favor of the new technology and systems seem to be one-sided, positing an asymmetrical struggle between those who have information technology and those who do not. It is not too much to argue that such a view is the equivalent of taking the European experience of the colonial wars of the late 19th century and saying that these wars would be the "future war" that modern armies should prepare for.[62]

Worse, this cast of thinking bears a suspicious resemblance to interwar French military doctrine which insisted on a carefully applied template or model of a "battaile conduite" (conducted or methodical battle) which every commander had to follow methodically, even slavishly, as the one way of conducting operations.[63] Of course, if the enemy diverges from the plan which then fails, the battlefield commander is thrown into a situation where he, too, is out of the books and forced to think on his own—extremely rapidly, deeply, and precisely.

Commanders trained in the idea of a schoolbook solution or who cannot understand "asymmetric" enemies beyond the level of threat they present will be particularly ill-equipped to master this requirement in an "unfamiliar" theater or conflict situation. Indeed, the nature and level of Iraqi resistance in the current war initially took British and American ground forces (Marines and Army) by surprise

even though they ultimately overcame that opposition. This surprise was because the enemy was not performing the way previous war games and exercises had led us to expect. Unfortunately, our war games all too often lend themselves to such misuse.[64] More importantly, as General Myers observes, the ability to operate with a high degree of unexpected risk and devise effective responses to unforeseen battlefield problems through innovative solutions or outright improvisation is the hallmark of the transformed military that we seek to achieve.[65] Too great an obsession or concern on the part of commanders for finding asymmetric threats rather than in thinking creatively about strategic and operational imperatives detracts from the mental flexibility needed to internalize the requisite transformation. The formalized way of thinking in terms of one model of operations that applies throughout the spectrum of conflict and all kinds of strategies and operations also reinforces the fundamentally anti-Clauzewitzian cast of mind of the prophets of the new RMA. They wrongly assert that it has made Clausewitz irrelevant or dead, and that the fog and friction of war has been overcome. Indeed, some even use the word, "omniscience" with regard to what the new technologies promise.[66] Logically, if we have omniscience, there can be no asymmetric threat by definition.

The point is that since enemies are inherently asymmetric, extremely so in the case of an enemy like al-Qaida, they present not just inherent asymmetries of strategies, operations, and tactics, but also present immense cognitive barriers to understanding which no technology can fully erase. Kant's admonition, as well as Barnett's observations about asymmetric war cited above, are particularly relevant in this context.[67] As Kipp and Grau point out, such cookie-cutter templates that postulate that technology has ended all the inherent friction and fog of war are seriously defective approaches to war. Not only do they fail to heed Von Moltke's insight that no doctrine or strategy survives the first clash of arms, they, like the French example cited above, almost seem to invite stagnation in thought and action, and formalized recipes for every conceivable strategic situation even as technology is radically transformed. Those reactions are a certain recipe for strategic defeat even if we achieve tactical and even operational victory.

> Such views are absolute in their cast; they reject any notion that military art must be adapted to particular theaters or opponents because the superior force will have a permanent technological delta or margin of victory. As noted above, this technological arrogance almost inevitably invites surprise, (i.e., a contravention of the supposed omniscience or dissipation of the fog of war that information dominance is supposed to provide—author).[67]

> Less-developed opponents will be able to determine an opponent's operational or tactical templates and exploit them. Cookie-cutter solutions do not work universally in different theaters, on different terrain, or against different forces and cultures. In fact, these solutions often increase the fog and friction of technology. The side with the greater ability to adapt, exercise initiative, and enforce tactical and operational innovations discovered during combat will enjoy success. . . . Information war has its own fog and friction that must be overcome, not assumed away.[68]

Thus the concept of asymmetry, as it has increasingly come to be applied to threats, often comes close to assuming away friction and fog in the battlefield or the larger strategic environment. It reinforces the false belief that we alone possess a truly clear idea of the battlespace and of the enemy from the start of conflict when such dominance and such understanding must be won, constantly reinforced, and may, in fact, be utterly different from what we imagine.[69] Clearly, partisans of the RMA have vastly and needlessly exaggerated the potential of the new technologies adapted for warfare, thus inducing a corrosive skepticism concerning the real advantages they offer. For example, Air Force spokesmen have long since argued that we are approaching a time when our technologies will make the battlefield wholly transparent, allowing us to see and kill any target.[70] Presumably we would then have perfect transparency and situational awareness.

Apart from being a non sequitur (what can go beyond perfect situational awareness?), this statement remains deeply false, notwithstanding the tremendous capabilities we have. Solely on the basis of Afghanistan and the unending stream of reports from there about insufficient intelligence on the battlefield and, in some cases, insufficient intelligence preparation of the battlefield, the fatuity of such claims becomes obvious.[71] These contentions similarly do not even begin to address the roots of the stupendous intelligence

failure that led to September 11, despite the fact that many involved in fighting al-Qaida previously both possessed and transferred substantial information to the appropriate authorities, but it never went to the places where it could have become actionable.[72] In this respect, it might be useful for officers to have to read some of the classics of world literature on the Western encounter with the Third World, particularly in times of revolution and war, so that they understand the tenuous and nonuniversal nature of Western reality and the differences between cultures with regard to modes of cognition of reality, including war and politics, in such theaters.[73]

Asymmetric and Strategic Threats: The New Threat Environment.

Pundits and officials alike regularly proclaim that the United States faces a wide spectrum of military threats. These proclamations are also generally part of an open or implicit critique of the administration in power for failing to adjust defense policy to meet the urgent threat that has just been named. Apart from the fact that defense policy and national strategy, whatever their orientation, cannot spin on a dime to meet each analyst's preferences, these proclamations frequently suffer from a common but insufficiently acknowledged defect. Namely, we cannot know with certainty what the next major threat (i.e., a threat sufficient to galvanize the government into making or preparing for war) is because we cannot know the future. Few people in a position of authority on September 10, 2001, could or would have predicted the form and nature of the threat that was about to confront us. And even those who had warned about such an eventuality probably could not imagine the scope and magnitude of what befell us on September 11. Indeed, as we now know, the available intelligence located in scattered branches of the overall intelligence community was not even available to the analysts and policymakers who needed or could begin to "connect the dots."[74] Nor were those who had warned about such eventualities heeded in any case.[75] Because we were unready to accept the existence of a threat of that magnitude and thus to prepare to forestall or at least blunt it, not only were we totally surprised, but also al-Qaida's achievement of total surprise compounded the advantage of its asymmetric strategy by an order

of magnitude. Indeed, the actuality of September 11 graphically and tragically validated the point that the asymmetric threat is one which goes beyond the limits of our physical and mental capabilities to conceive of or execute. At the same time, while rattling on about asymmetric threats, we underestimated our enemy's potential for thinking strategically and thus could not "connect the dots."

Because all threat assessments are inherently probabalistic—i.e., an assessment of likely probabilities—defense departments, even when they do not have global responsibilities, must prepare their military forces to engage a wide spectrum of threats. While this may drive the planning for force spectrum dominance, this does not mean that such dominance is automatically achieved. Even if the force is tactically or operationally able to achieve this objective, if the strategic leadership misreads the nature of the threat, as we did with regard to terrorism before 2001, the military and political leadership will be unable to deal with the threat. Thus as Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz recently testified, we had no plan for attacking Afghanistan and al-Qaida targets there before September 11.[76]

There are many reasons why failure to grasp the nature of the threat accurately and thus be ready to fight it effectively may take place. Often the most likely or inferable threat is not the most dangerous or urgent one as there is no *a priori* law that can certify with regularity the relationship between the likelihood and scale of a threat. And to call such a likely or urgent threat or threats asymmetric does not help planners much as they seek to devise counters to it.

To give an example from a foreign military, we need only look at Israel. Obviously the most immediate threat is that posed by terrorism and particularly suicide bombings. Thus it has devised offensive counterterrorist tactics against the Palestinians.[77] But the most dangerous threat that haunts the imagination of Israeli planners and officials is clearly the prospect of a missile attack with weapons of mass destruction by Iran, or Syria. Nor do those alternatives exhaust the array of possible threats and of their combinations or permutations with which Israeli planners must reckon; for example, an urgent threat is the possibility of terrorist strikes on Israel triggering reciprocal moves that drag Arab states and/or Iran into war with Israel.[78]

Similar considerations apply to the United States. It is not just, as Rumsfeld and his deputies have repeatedly stated, that we are likely to be surprised again as we were in September 2001. He, leading officials of the Department of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff also have forcefully contended that we are increasingly liable to confront what they call asymmetric threats: WMD, new forms of terrorism, cyber-attacks, attacks on space assets and information networks, advanced conventional weapons, and anti-access strategies and capabilities, to deny us entry or access into theaters of war, and that the deployment of these threats will be in many respects unexpected.[79] Consequently, we will likely fall victim to surprise once more, perhaps even strategic surprise.[80]

Rumsfeld has frequently listed the kinds of threats that may be included in so-called asymmetric threats.

> There's no question but that the fact that as you look around the world and ask yourself what countries have armies and navies and air forces that approximate ours that are going to tackle us, there are very few candidates. When one looks around the world at threats and capabilities that can impose enormous damage on our country and our forces, they tend not to be large, heavy, blue-water navies, major armored forces on the ground or major attack aircraft. Therefore, what we've got to do is, we've got to maintain those important capabilities we have to defend and deter in the event that they're needed. But we also have to migrate a portion of this force so that we can deal more effectively with the kinds of threats—so called asymmetrical threats —that we face. I mean we face problems with ballistic missiles of all ranges, of cruise missiles. We face problems of terrorist attacks. We face problems and threats from weapons of mass destruction. Increasingly we're going to be facing cyber-attacks and attacks on information capabilities of our country. Because we're so dependent on satellites, we're so dependent on information technologies, the most advanced nation in the world almost becomes the most vulnerable to attacks against those systems.[81]

Following this logic, the actual nature of the threats we face transcends the standard definition of WMD that comprises nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. Their devastating force arises from two considerations: not their asymmetry to our force posture,

but rather their "asymmetry" to all our notions of how enemies should and will fight; and second, the potential scale of their effects upon us or our allies. Indeed, as contemporary warfare shows, purely conventional weapons, used either conventionally or innovatively, can wreak enormous damage. And if our enemies strike at strategic targets or at targets like nuclear power plants, that conventional strike could be construed as having unleashed an attack using a WMD.[82] Certainly the potential destruction unleashed thereby could, in some cases, approach levels commensurate with that of a WMD attack. Indeed, other major powers openly have stated that they would regard such strikes as tantamount to one requiring a first-strike nuclear response.[83]

Therefore, and for several reasons, we should replace the concept of asymmetrical threats with the concept of strategic threats, e.g., the proliferation and/or use of weapons that can inflict truly strategic losses or negative outcomes upon the United States and/or its allies. While the term "asymmetry" is entirely appropriate to a consideration of strategies, operations, tactics, the nature of the enemy, and the war itself, using it to analyze and assess threats seems misplaced and insufficient. The threat is not asymmetric, rather the enemy's strategy is. As we have used cruise missiles to reduce the risk of casualties and to leverage our own asymmetry vis-à-vis various enemies, we can hardly call their use of the same weapon against us as asymmetric. Similarly we used nuclear weapons and the threat of their use regularly after 1945, often, as in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to achieve an asymmetric imbalance in conventional forces. In 1945 we aimed to avoid fighting a conventional amphibious operation against the Imperial Japanese forces. Nuclear use or the threat thereof is recognized by virtually every commentator as being the "asymmetric" antidote to what normally promises to be a bloody, protracted, or inconclusive conventional slugfest. Similar considerations, stated above, apply to the enemy's use of various forms of missiles and combined arms, including terrorism to deny us access to his territory and/or ports.

Therefore the term "strategic threats" seems more useful analytically and more effectively sharpens our ability to devise counters to those threats. Strategic threats not only refer to numbers

of casualties, although that in itself may have strategic significance. Rather this designation refers to the impact on the war effort and significance of the strike upon the recipient of the strikes if those targets are rendered useless or destroyed. If destroying those targets has a disproportionate impact upon a combatant's ability to sustain operations, then the threat to those targets should properly be called strategic whether it is made by hang glider or nuclear weapons. Rather than defining asymmetric as the mating of old mass destruction attacks to new technology, it makes more sense to go a step further and describe asymmetry as being inherent in the scope of the damage done by the weapon regardless of its provenance. Indeed, if the most urgent threats exist, according to the NSS, at the crossroads of radicalism and technology, then calling them asymmetric actually underestimates the significance that they might have and the magnitude of the threat they pose.[84]

For example, analyzing developments since September 11, Therese Delpech observes that those attacks brought about a fundamental strategic reorientation if not transformation. Specifically she observes that,

> **The privatization of violence has reached the point where the phenomenon represents a challenge of a strategic, not just a tactical order.** When the potential victims of terrorist attacks on urban centers can be numbered in the thousands, the nature of terrorism changes. It can no longer be dealt with by the intelligence services and police, as has been done in Europe, often successfully, for decades. This is even truer if the attacks include weapons of mass destruction, a real and little understood threat in Europe; non-conventional terrorist attacks are now not just a possibility but a probability. They form an integral part of the manifest rise in violence at the beginning of the twenty-first century and that sea change needs to be properly recognized in European capitals.[85] (Bold in original.)

Therefore to label these kinds of threats as being simply asymmetric merely underscores our difficulty in grasping them. Those threats may be asymmetric because they transcend our cognitive capabilities, but the strategy that employs such threats, not the threats themselves, is asymmetric. Because these threats are not isolated tactical operations undertaken without reference to larger

operational and strategic objectives, depicting them as asymmetric negates our ability to understand the enemy's larger strategy. Thus it also becomes harder for us to grasp the nature of those selfsame threats. Since it is more the strategy that is asymmetric and transcends our capabilities of cognition than the actual threat, emphasizing the threat over the strategy gets our threat assessment process wrong.

Indeed, the conditions auguring such threats are well-known and are often publicly formulated. Lord George Robertson, Secretary General of NATO, recently predicted that the world, and specifically the West and NATO, would encounter more instability from the states residing in the arc of crisis: North Africa, Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asia. This instability will not stop at the water's edge but will "spill over" into Europe and North America through migration, transnational crime, etc. In turn those phenomena will probably engender more terrorism, failed states, and proliferation of WMD. Consequently, this all adds up to what he calls a "guaranteed supply chain of instability."[86]

Therefore it is very likely that threats resembling those outlined by Robertson and Delpech will be widespread and prevalent for years. They probably easily will manifest themselves as threats of a strategic magnitude. Perhaps it would be more useful for the U.S. defense establishment to replace the term "asymmetric threats" with the notion of strategic threats, an approach that focuses on the scale of the damage to critical targets and interests from such threats. Then we could leave the term "asymmetry" to the level of operations, strategy, and the nature of the enemy, or of the war itself, where it belongs. Doing so would both enable and force our leaders, military and political, to exploit the consequences of that asymmetry for maximum benefit when making their plans. In addition, focusing on the scale of threats to our interests as well as the targets is more consistent with Rumsfeld's and the Pentagon's own intellectual evolution. The recently described the present threat environment to an audience of Marines as follows:

> In the 21st century, we're dealing not simply with conventional capabilities but potentially with unconventional capabilities—with chemical and biological and radiation and nuclear weapons. There you're not talking about sustaining an attack and losing a

> hundred or few thousand. You're talking about risking the lives of tens of thousands, and potentially hundreds of thousands of people.[87]

The threat is presented here in terms of losses of people and casualties in hitherto inconceivable numbers, not in the method by which it will be delivered. Thus Rumsfeld postulates a strategic threat by virtue of its size, impact, and the medium of its delivery.[88] When we use the term "asymmetric" or "asymmetry" to describe threats, by focusing on the platform by which the threat is delivered, we focus attention on the tactical level of engagement not the strategic objectives that are at risk. Realigning our thinking so that we think more strategically also means speaking and acting more strategically.

The "Asymmetric" and Strategic Threat Environment.

Compelling reasons exist for thinking and acting strategically and for not just rethinking but also reclassifying the kinds of threats hitherto regarded as "asymmetric." This does not mean that the use of unconventional weapons like WMD or IW is not in some sense asymmetric to generally accepted conventions of thinking about warfare. Certainly the use of WMD is asymmetric (not the best word here but still appropriate) to our concepts of ethical behavior in warfare. Rather this process of reclassifying the threats we face should help us clarify them, specifically beginning with their nature. For example, we can then proceed to ask against whom or what these so-called asymmetric means may be directed. This analytical process should give us a better and more precise assessment of the threats we face and from whence they come. Then we can proceed more securely to an understanding of how to overcome and defeat them. Certainly the current strategic environment suggests some fundamental transformations are occurring that magnify the possibilities for employing such asymmetric strategies and unexpected threats.

First, "asymmetric" and strategic threats have become multidimensional. Threats originating in any of the following dimensions: land, sea, air, underwater, space, and the ether, can

strike at a target, including major strategic targets, in any of those dimensions, as shown in the matrix in Figure 1.[89]

	Land	Sea	Air	Underwater	Space	Cyber-Sphere
Land						
Sea						
Air						
Underwater						
Space						
Cyber-Sphere						

Figure 1.

In other words, threats and operations against them are no longer exclusively determined by geography.[90] Because of this multidimensionality, greatly facilitated by the accelerating diffusion of high technology (even technology of the 1970s or 1980s, if used innovatively, can wreak havoc upon targets), any individual or an institution anywhere in the world, who possesses access to the means of carrying out a threat, can target anyone or any object somewhere else in the world or in space or underwater, or in the cybersphere. Moreover the originator of these threats need not launch them from his point of origin. All he need do is set them in motion as Bin Laden has done. Then those carrying out the mission can identify the appropriate medium and locales wherein they can launch a threat and where it should strike. This also greatly multiplies the possibilities for nebulous relationships between sponsoring states and shadowy transnational organizations like al-Qaida. Thus there is no geographical center to the enemy in the GWOT.[91]

Consequently the number of strategic targets expands to infinity. Anywhere on earth can become a strategic target or a "launch pad" for threats possessing a strategic magnitude quite quickly. Therefore, we cannot preplan sufficient capability to ensure global and multidimensional readiness. Rather the evolving nature of the threat environment drives us, as the Pentagon has been

driven, to develop force-sizing and training concepts that relate to our vulnerabilities and the capabilities we need across multiple dimensions and venues to meet them.[92] Additionally, our growing awareness of the magnitude of this strategic transformation and its consequences is similarly fueling the Pentagon's and congressional pressure for reform of the national intelligence system.[93]

Compelling reasons for this drive exist. For example, nobody in the administration would have imagined before September 11 that Afghanistan's regime was a vital interest of the United States and that Afghanistan itself was a strategic target. Plus, the idea that a strategic attack upon vital U.S. targets could be directed or launched from there would have been inconceivable as well as laughable. More broadly, it did not occur to many people that failed states provide ideal refuge for threats of this magnitude that affect us, our allies, or our interests. Certainly nobody fully appreciated the nature and scope of al-Qaida's threats, yet within days of September 11 virtually the entire assessment and analysis of that organization was presented in full detail in the press.[94] This indicated that the information about the type and size of the threat was available.[95] Thus a large part of the preceding intelligence failure is at the level of strategic analysis and assessment. It drives home the point that what makes this "asymmetric strategy" a compelling threat is that it surpasses our capabilities of cognition, something that calls those powers of cognition and their products into question. This multidimensional threat environment also creates conditions for the growth of threats against us in at least four directions.

We have already observed that threats can originate and culminate in any of six dimensions, two of which are relatively new (space and cyberspace). Beyond that, the other three directions wherein threats are growing are: the nature of the weapons that can pose this kind of threat, the number of targets that can be described as being ones whose loss would have a disproportionately strategic significance, and the number of players—state and nonstate actors—who actively seek or possess these diverse capabilities, e.g., WMD, and who can strike at those targets. While WMD as originally understood is not a new threat, today's threat of proliferation encompasses more than just biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons. More and different

weapons properly used or combined in unforeseen and innovative ways can achieve comparable strategic or operational results, thanks to the quantitative proliferation of dual-use and or primarily military technologies. Since this capability for making weapons is spreading throughout the world to formerly backward Third World states, the possibilities for such proliferation are magnified.[96] Likewise Thomas Friedman's "super-empowered angry man" armed with a computer could create strategic havoc without much difficulty.[97] Certainly old weapons, "used asymmetrically," as well as existing or even "old" technologies, can have strategic impact when they strike a target. The growth in threats due to the proliferation of dual-use systems and technologies does not even address forthcoming technological developments, e.g., systematic exploitation of nano-technologies or genetic engineering.[98]

Second, more players are getting involved in proliferation. Proliferation is no longer restricted to states or firms who export the skills, technology, or weapons needed to pose credible threats. Indeed, even nonstate actors like the left-wing Revolutionary Armed Forces in Colombia (FARC), which combines revolutionary rhetoric with trafficking in drugs, disposes of conventional military assets like an air force.[99] We now confront the phenomenon of secondary or tertiary proliferation where those who have been able to develop WMD capabilities, thanks to outside assistance, turn around and provide these capabilities to other aspiring states or movements like al-Qaida, the Palestinian Authority, or Hamas. These nonstate organizations also can seek to exploit available scientific knowledge and the greed of criminal elements who can provide the wherewithal for them to manufacture weapons that produce a strategic threat or actual WMD. The old and new proliferators alike can sell these products to other governments, quasi-state terrorist organizations, or use their own capabilities to incite those terrorist groups to act more boldly because they are extending deterrence to those terrorist organizations.[100]

Thus, rogue states who already sponsor terrorism can soon provide extended deterrence for it and for the groups that undertake terrorist actions. Iran, for example, has already threatened Israel with

just such a response to counterterrorist activities against its clients like Hizballah in Lebanon.[101] Likewise, North Korea regularly threatens a sea of fire, nuclear war, etc. The reciprocal relationship between North Korea and Pakistan, where both sell each other technologies and knowhow needed to produce nuclear weapons, exemplifies this secondary or second- or even third-tier proliferation. Also, Pakistan's policy since the late 1980s to sponsor a war of terrorism entangling India, while using its own WMD to deter India from going beyond counterterrorism in Kashmir, is well-known.

Yet for all the analyses of the new terrorism that has emerged in the wake of the September 11 attacks, it still is the fact that, as Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon once said, "terrorism has an address." It cannot function without extensive logistical and long-term financial support even if the actual costs of operations are small. This means, as it did in the period 1965-85 when the Soviet bloc's intelligence services were responsible for aiding and facilitating, if not instigating, much of the terror, that a state either must actively support or at least passively permit terrorists to establish a base in its home country or in countries allied to or controlled by it.[102] Moreover, weapons production also finally depends upon the assistance of either a government or elements of it, whether they be rogue elements or official ones. Iraq and Iran's extensive sponsorship of the Palestinian Authority and other terrorist groups, as well as al-Qaida's ability to function with impunity in Afghanistan, show that terrorist operations may exist in their own right, but they flourish almost exclusively under benevolent state patronage.[103]

As the Soviet and contemporary examples indicate, these states and or terrorists can form multiple kinds of relationships. Governments can exercise direct control over terrorist activities by controlling support for them; or, simply by virtue of their deliberate policy or by being a weak or failing state, governments can permit or allow terrorists to exploit the resources and power of the state to accomplish their objectives. Alternatively, the relationship can be a deeply covert one where terrorists operate under conditions of "plausible deniability," where uncovering the true nature of the relationship is an extremely difficult business. Alternatively, we could see a relationship of tactical alliance where a state or terrorist

group puts its resources at the disposal of the other to carry out coinciding operations against shared enemies without having a deeply institutionalized relationship. All these types of state-terrorist relationships exist currently or have recently existed, and there is no obstacle in principle to the revival of earlier forms of state support for terrorism.

Since we know that the states supporting or that have supported terrorist activities are also proliferating states, some of which also are proliferating their own WMD like North Korea and Pakistan, the administration's apprehensions about living "at the crossroads of radicalism and technology" are well-founded. Moreover, some evidence supports the fact that as North Korea's conventional posture relative to that of South Korea and the United States declines, it is depending more on its asymmetric capabilities.[104] Therefore the possibility that it or other similarly situated states may rely ever more on those capabilities and use them to support terrorism or other forms of unconventional war, even possibly going beyond extending deterrence to providing capabilities. For example, we know that al-Qaida has sought chemical, bacteriological, radiological, and nuclear weapons (CBRN), and also there are reports that Palestinian terrorist organizations have thought about obtaining them as well.[1O5] The foregoing facts make it clear that the threat environment, whereby so called "asymmetric threats" and, more to the point, asymmetric strategies may be launched against us, is a growing one, not a shrinking one. Hence the need for effective strategies and forces with which to counter these strategies and the threats embodied within them. This proliferation of opportunities for waging campaigns based on the use or threatened use of either CBRN weapons or of actual WMD along with terrorism and other components of what have been defined as asymmetric threats is the second of the trends we have outlined that exist now and shape the strategic and threat environments in which we operate.

The third trend currently shaping the strategic and threat environments is that, since the capabilities that currently exist and that can create immense damage either to military or civilian targets in the United States and abroad are also increasing in quality as well as quantity, mass destruction or large-scale social crises can be triggered by means other than nuclear, chemical, or biological

weapons. By qualitative improvement we mean not only the incorporation of information technology and advanced electronic and sensor capabilities that add to precision targeting and lethality, but also new and emerging technologies, or the use of space-based systems. China, Israel, Iran, and India already have or are building such space capabilities as could allow them to use space either for the traversal of weapons or ultimately as a platform. Russia is providing major assistance to states like Iran, China, and India; while China does the same for Iran, North Korea, and Pakistan.[106] The intelligence community also discerns that beyond support from proliferators, recipients of WMD capabilities are steadily improving their deception and denial efforts, upgrading their access to relevant dual-use and other technologies and capacities for assimilating them, and increasing their access to the expertise needed to build and maintain these weapons. In this connection, we must underscore the important fact that proliferation of conventional weapons is becoming ever more global an affair because states are now building their own indigenous capabilities for producing them, even if they are not the last word in technological and military capability.[1O7] The rush to indigenize production and then sell it abroad to justify the cost is leading states who hitherto have refrained from arms sales, either out of principle or due to lack of capacity, to join this competition.

Thus India, Pakistan, Israel, Iran, and Turkey are busily developing their indigenous arms producing capability in the conventional field and seeking markets, not least in the Middle East and Central Asia. Iran and Pakistan support terrorists or have done so as an integral part of their strategy for a long time; or disaffected elements within governments, as in Pakistan, are supporting them. North Korea also is trying to upgrade its capabilities, as we know. Iran boasts that it can produce all the anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM) it needs to defend its territorial waters against attack and, according to the testimony of the former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, Admiral Thomas Wilson, and his successor, Admiral Lowell Jacoby, Iran already can block the Persian Gulf to outside traffic for brief periods of time.[108] Iran's weapons acquisition program, with its stress upon naval, air, and air defense systems,

clearly aims to deny us access to the Gulf, as well.[109] Iran also now offers the Shahab-3 missile for sale abroad.[110] Given the fragility of controls over Pakistan's armed forces and intelligence agencies and their links to Islamic and drug trafficker forces, it also would not be surprising if some of the homegrown weapons that it produces find their way to enemies who threaten our interests, forces, or allies. Certainly, Iran is more than willing to provide large quantities of conventional weapons to terrorists as the Karine-A affair of 2002 showed.[111]

High-precision conventional weapons and other emerging technologies that could strike at key or strategic targets represent a threat that is not confined to strike platforms. Other states see the possibilities inherent in such usage of these weapons as justifying a possible nuclear strike since they are tantamount to a nuclear strike, e.g., a conventional strike on a nuclear power plant.[112] It is not just that IW and information operations (IO) could degrade critical infrastructures to a point of major social crisis. As some Russian theorists warn, new generations of weapons could combine threats, for example, information weapons that leave lasting biological aftereffects on their target.[113]

Consequently, we must expand our own cognitive horizons to think of how new or even existing systems can be innovatively combined and deployed to produce wholly unforeseen types of threats. For example, Russia's dean of military thinkers, Retired General M. A. Gareyev, President of the Academy of Military Sciences, went even further. While insisting that armed force remains the essence of war, he stated that the major strategic events of the 1990s, including the Soviet breakup, indicate that wars are still the continuation of politics by other means, including informational ones. Therefore the resort to force or to other nonviolent means like IW, i.e., even a resort by an aggressor to purely informational and "nonviolent" means, is a conscious act of a state's strategy and policy and is undertaken to achieve a definite strategic goal. Accordingly, such operations are implicitly close to, if not tantamount to, war or warlike actions. And the strategic goal is the destruction of an entire socio-political order over time without even firing a shot.

> Future wars could be fought without even resorting to force,

> purely by informational and electronic means. For this reason the cataclysm culminating in the collapse of the Soviet empire and the Soviet Union illustrate that whole states and coalitions can disintegrate as a result of confrontation on the international arena without the direct application of force.[114]

This kind of potential use of IW either against Russia or by Russia against its enemies is increasingly accepted in Russian military writing.[115] Thus IW's capacity for destabilizing or "disorganizing" (to use the Russian word now in vogue) an entire military force, bloc, or state clearly is a strategic one, and this aspect imparts a quality of self-sufficiency to IW and IO. Indeed, Russian thinking about IO and IW in the absence as yet of an official definition seems to be converging around their potential to disrupt, disorganize, and potentially destabilize the entire information environment of opposing sides.[116] Were that to occur, it could easily lead to internal disturbances, demonstrations and uprisings, and even terrorist acts.

IW also permeates all other forms of strategic confrontation: political and economic warfare, diplomacy, and armed struggle, not to mention war (Gareyev distinguishes between these two). Yet IW retains its essentially independent character. Its goal is to demoralize the armed forces and population, paralyzing the other side's will. It accompanies political and diplomatic pressure and confrontation and is targeted on the adversary's home front and military forces. This assessment of IW's potential is not just Gareyev's doctrinal formulation, but has emerged from an extensive preceding discussion and coincided with views expressed by Deputy Chief of Staff General V. L. Manilov in 1998.[117] There may also be Chinese theorists writing on contemporary war and IW and IO who think along similar lines.[118]

Since then, more and more Russian writing on the subject has assessed IW as a strategic capability, and systems needed to wage it are regularly called for. As part of this Russian debate, Russian writers defined IW much more broadly than do American writers, thereby influencing Manilov's and Gareyev's formulation, as well as the Security Concept and the defense doctrine of 1999-2000. Those analysts included as IW those weapons and that warfare targeted against the minds and bodies of enemy combatants and

even of whole societies. They see this form of warfare as ushering in a new series of weapons or technologies that can strike enemies in wholly new ways, including biological or psychotropic weapons, thus combining IW with BW or IO with bacteriological threats. This way of thinking could eventually generate a formulation bringing informational and biological weapons, as well as chemical and/or biological warfare (CBW) and IW closer together in theory and/or in practice.[119] Since the Russian and Chinese militaries are in constant discussion with each other, perhaps we should understand their "asymmetric" understanding of new trends in weapons technologies and act accordingly. Moreover, it is arguable that we cannot deter IW other than by threatening preemptive strikes in peacetime or the threat of overwhelming reprisal up to and including nuclear strikes.[120] And obviously the discussion above hardly exhausts the possibilities for asymmetric strategies and threats derived from them that are targeted at us, our allies, and our common interests.

We must understand the consequences of this survey of the environment. While it is hardly a complete inventory of trends in today's world, it does reveal just how dangerous a strategic environment we face, and how it is worsening or could worsen if we do not act vigilantly. Apart from the multidimensionality of threats in a spatial, quantitative, and qualitative sense, the opportunities for waging asymmetric war and employing asymmetric strategies have grown by orders of magnitude. Due to those increases, potential aggressors have vastly enhanced opportunities for surprise attack using any of the media listed in Figure 1. Moreover, they can further complicate our lives by concealing their identity. It should be remembered that nobody took credit at first for September 11. Likewise, IW lends itself to the attack that is not easily recognizable as such or that is long-delayed until triggered externally. Moreover, experience has shown the great difficulties we have in deciding if we were deliberately attacked and, if so, by whom.[121]

Similarly, as noted above, it is not particularly difficult for terrorists to act on behalf of a state or for the state to subcontract operations to terrorists and build plausible deniability to inhibit effective strategic counteractions. In a strategic environment where increasingly the first operation may be the only operation, and

given our enemies' beliefs that because of our public and pervasive concern about casualty avoidance they need only attack in ways that have a large impact to oust us or our partners and allies from our forward bases, attacks of enormous magnitude and surprise become a more possible and tempting an operation.[122] Osama Bin Laden's oft-cited belief that we are afraid to take casualties, a view shared by adversaries from Milosevic to Saddam Hussein and even some Chinese thinkers about war, provides the worldview needed to believe that use of surprise through a combination of high and low-technology innovatively employed can, in a single blow, either decisively defeat the United States or inflict sufficient harm on it that it will be unable to wage effective counterstrikes. Or alternatively, we would then be forced to fight a war of attrition suited to our adversaries' preferences. These enemies appear not to learn from contrary experience and could easily miscalculate the consequences of their attack. This pervasive misapprehension of American policy on the part of our enemies confirms Rumsfeld's and others' warnings about the likelihood of surprise and even possible reprises of September 11. Moreover, they justify the belief expressed by many officials that deterrence against such enemies is impossible, a condition that therefore validates our new preemptive or preventive war posture.[123]

Clearly, then, it does not profit us to think of asymmetrical threats and asymmetrical warfare as "not fighting fair."[124] Nor is it useful to lump together or conflate asymmetric threats, strategies, and war as many publications do.[125] Such assessments, whatever other merits they may have, fail by not taking into account the probabalistic nature of threat assessments and responses to those threats. There is no "right way" or "one way" to fight a war which, after all, is inherently a relational affair, a contest of wills on two or more sides. No reason exists for our enemies obliging us and fighting our kind of war, or as Mao said, "you fight your war and I'll fight mine."

These actors are clearly exploiting the trends we listed previously as now comprising the emerging threat environment. They can then exploit even conventional style attacks or operations, not to mention weapons or technologies, to achieve a strategic effect that is greatly disproportionate to the means involved. Neither is September 11 the

only such example of this reality. For example, the terrorist attack on India's Parliament on December 13, 2001, certainly shook up the regional and perhaps global strategic equation because it opened a second front in the war on terrorism that was clearly targeted on Pakistan, a center of gravity for the alliance against the Taliban and al-Qaida. As the Taliban has, by all accounts, resurrected itself in Pakistan and Afghanistan, apparently with help from disaffected Pakistani and even possibly Russian elements, it can be said that this attack was evidently wholly unexpected, yet in retrospect it made excellent strategic sense.[126] While it confounded Indian and U.S. expectations, it clearly was part of a larger operating plan, but no high-tech weaponry was involved. In these ways the attacks in New Delhi resembled those of September 11.

As the nature of a strategic threat is also defined by the targets involved, strategic targets and strategic threats need not be attacked by WMD nor are they only vulnerable to attacks by WMD. The attack on India's Parliament demonstrates this fact. Conventional strikes, even if they are not launched by precision-guided munitions (PGMs), can attack strategic targets and lead even to the possibility of a first-strike using nuclear or other WMD capabilities, as Russia's defense doctrine all but shouts to the world.[127] Similarly, weapons can be converted from their originally intended uses to new purposes with devastating effect, e.g., the conversion of commercial airliners into cruise missiles aimed at the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and presumably the White House or the Capitol on September 11.

These trends that are transforming the threats, and hence the strategic environments, undoubtedly will, if they have not done so already, qualitatively transform the current and future strategic environment to the detriment of the United States and its allies unless we and they properly understand and counter them. Since we have failed to cut off proliferation to rogue states who are fashioning such weapons and who also are long-time sponsors of terrorism, we have allowed this multidimensional process of expanding proliferation threats to take place. Therefore, this trend also allows the possibility of terrorists operating with WMD or being protected by their sponsors who possess that capability to become all too conceivable. This threat exemplifies what the *National Security Strategy* calls the

crossroads of radicalism and technology and regards as the gravest threat to our security.[128]

These proliferation recipients and proliferators—Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, North Korea, and Libya—are building WMD capabilities based on technology, weapons, and know-how obtained from Russia, China, covert (and not so covert) business dealings abroad, and from each other. Their WMD and other military programs also embody the phenomenon of so-called secondary proliferation where states who received assistance from proliferators then, in turn, provide assistance to other states who seek to emulate their activities. Secondary proliferation, especially when coupled with the ability to use existing weapons in new ways or to improve their quality and the capability to produce them, or to provide for terrorists to exploit them (and there are many ways of doing that), greatly enhances the consequences of a proliferation threat from Russia and China, both of whom hitherto essentially have stonewalled the United States on proliferation.[129] Both these states are also engaged in a bilateral military relationship where Russia is assiduously building up Chinese capabilities which are clearly intended to be directed against the United States and its allies. And Russia's and China's continuing proliferation to Iran and earlier to Iraq are well-known by now.

Although proliferating states have multiple and diverse interests, there are commonalities to the strategic goals they all apparently have with regard to proliferation. These commonalities invariably place them in an oppositional stance vis-à-vis U.S. strategic objectives. The common denominator or outcome in all cases is that the proliferator, once it acquires truly usable capabilities, has immunized itself from most, if not all, foreign supervision or control over its defense programs. Indeed, as Lawrence Freedman observes, "acquiring a nuclear capability is a statement of a lack of confidence in alternative security arrangements," and, while increasing other neighboring states' security problems, it also establishes the limits to any regional system of collective security.[130] This point is critically significant in the discussions of Iraq and North Korea. Clearly those who opposed action against Iraq were unwilling to run risks to enforce UN mandates if Iraq had obtained usable nuclear weapons

and delivery systems.

Likewise, the administration may well have thought that North Korea had nuclear weapons, even before Pyongyang claimed to have them. But even if this claim is untrue and we do not believe North Korea to have such weapons, the conventional threat posed by the DPRK to Seoul and South Korea generally is of a magnitude that led many to conclude that we were effectively deterred from taking any military action against North Korea, despite its proliferation and violation of international treaties. Here again, possession of nuclear weapons or the inculcation of the belief that it has them, combined with a formidable conventional deterrent in a threatening posture, evidently frees North Korea, at least in its own mind, from having to yield to the dictates of foreign and stronger powers.

Proliferation, whatever other purposes a government may have in mind, is a road to an autarchic defense policy that essentially declares the proliferator's territory and sphere of influence as being off limits to other powers' military policy and influence.[131] Proliferation thus represents, among other things, a determined effort to free the proliferating state from American and other international influences on its national security policy. It is a bid for untrammeled power to either deter or threaten neighbors and third parties. If a key aspect of our strategy is dissuading would-be proliferators from doing so, their efforts to proliferate are implicitly, if not explicitly, aimed at thwarting that strategic objective.

Recent trends in world politics suggest that when new states (and they need not be rogue states, e.g., India's example) even appear to have "a bomb in the basement," as in North Korea's case, the default option of the international community is accommodation, continued engagement and the offer of more rewards to that state, i.e., appeasement. Other analysts fear that the outcome in such cases might be the diminution of America's commitment to extended deterrence on behalf of distant allies.[132] That outcome, of course, is inherently contradictory to our strategy and national security objectives and policies, making the acquisition of such capabilities an inherently asymmetrical act vis-à-vis that strategy, and those policies and goals. Inasmuch as our doctrine and policy aim to create situations where the United States has an almost unhampered ability

to project military power on a global basis and deter everyone else, proliferation is inherently an asymmetrical counterstrategy to that aspiration.

A second common denominator of proliferating states' threat to our interests is that their increased capabilities then feed their growing appetite. Iran's acquisition of WMD and improved conventional capabilities has led it to threaten Azerbaijan and Kazakstan, states in which we have a growing interest, with conventional forces, as well as Israel.[133] Iran now also admits that many al-Qaida operatives have fled there, and Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Institution (ISI), claims that the operational base of al-Qaida has now shifted to Iran, presumably to intensify the cooperation among terrorist groups in the Middle East against Israeli and American interests. Meanwhile, according to the State Department, Iran remains the leading state sponsor of international terrorism.[134] Earlier in 2002 it was caught red-handed trying to escalate the terrorist war started by Yasser Arafat and other Palestinian terrorist groups against Israel.[135] It also has conducted many terrorist operations abroad, including, if recent evidence is to be believed, the bombing of the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires in 1994.[136] Thus attacks far from Iran are hardly to be ruled out. As noted above, Iran has also publicly threatened to extend its deterrence to Hizbullah in Lebanon, a leading anti-Israel terrorist group, to deter Israel from retaliating against raids and attacks that Hizbullah might carry out.[137] It has also extended to them somewhere between 8-12,000 rockets and short-range missiles provided through and/or by Syria for use against Israel or potentially other enemies. Iran has also conducted exercises implicitly employing chemical weapons in the Persian Gulf.[138] More recently, its Defense Minister, Admiral Ali Shamkani, announced that Iran can produce, completely on its own, land-based anti-ship cruise missiles in order to deny its enemies the use of or access to the Persian Gulf. Nor is it content to stop there, as it is also developing anti-aircraft and missiles, including systems that attack stealthy planes to deny us access to the Gulf or contiguous bodies of air, sea, and land.[139] Similarly, our enemies are evidently able to threaten at least some of our space assets or are working on acquiring them, as well as space denial capabilities along with the

range of precision strike and counterprecision capabilities.[140]

We can easily envision a scenario where a nuclear armed state like Iran that sponsors and harbors terrorism could deliberately sponsor terrorist attacks and then try to deter retaliation by invoking the threat of escalation to nuclear or other forms of WMD. At the same time, it could also use or threaten to use whatever precision, counterprecision, or anti-space and space denial assets it possessed for those purposes. Indeed, as noted above, Iran threatened to do just that in 2000 when Israel considered staging reprisal raids against Hizbullah terrorism originating in Lebanon.[141] Pakistan's ability to support conventional probes like that in Kargil in 1999, as well as the current terrorist offensive and terrorists in Kashmir, based on the belief that India cannot escalate beyond a conventional point due to Pakistan's nuclear capability also exemplifies this strategy. It, too, shows that proliferators' rising nuclear and conventional capabilities facilitate their interest in and capabilities to wage asymmetric warfare.

North Korea likewise exemplifies this phenomenon. North Korea not only sells its missiles abroad, using them as a source of revenue, it perhaps has also been emboldened by its closeness to achieving a usable nuclear capability to launch more conventional probes against the South Korean armed forces and to strengthen its own conventional and missile capabilities as American commanders have testified to Congress.[142] It also has stated openly that its WMD program aims to give it complete freedom from international and/or American controls.[143] Therefore it appears that the consequence, if not the intention, of the new proliferation is to make whole areas of the world safer for conventional war and/or terrorism, while trying to make them off limits to U.S. and allied forces. This is because adversaries from Iraq to China and North Korea perceive, in no small measure due to earlier U.S. policies and statements expressing concern for casualties and trumpeting force protection as mission number one, that the United States or its allies will not accept either protracted conflicts or heavy casualties and are deterred, thanks to their possession of these strategic capabilities. Undoubtedly, such statements amounted to a strategic failure on our part, given their impact on external audiences.[144] This strategy even had some

temporary success in frustrating U.S. planning for an attack upon Iraq. In fact, the United States was, at one point, obliged to state that, if he disarms, Saddam Hussein could remain in power since the act of disarmament itself would then represent or constitute a "regime change," a significant moderation of our original objectives.[145] Meanwhile, we did not attain accurate or complete knowledge of Iraq's overall military capabilities before attacking it, not to mention its WMD capabilities. The repeated statements of Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic, Chinese military officials and officers, and others concerning the U.S. inability to accept high casualties show that this widely-advertised belief undermines deterrence by sending precisely the wrong signal abroad. Moreover, in the Middle East, the repeated use of WMD since Egypt first did so in the Yemeni civil war of 1962-67 has never been countered by *anyone*.[146] Thus governments there have had ample reason to believe that they can threaten or actually use these weapons with relative impunity if their targets do not have them.

Consequently, proliferators seek to threaten and intimidate their neighbors, deny the United States and other friendly forces access to threatened allies' territories, and compel us to leave the potential theater of operations, lest we face the threat of WMD or terrorism backed up by those and burgeoning conventional capabilities. The impact of proliferation on the viability of an anti-access or area denial strategy is clearly an element that makes those strategies asymmetrical to our own strategy, if the willingness to entertain using such weapons is real. If that is the case, even if the threat is essentially one of long-standing and entirely symmetrical to our threatened acquisition of forward presence against these actors, it certainly reflects the new threat environment. For as Chris Donnelly observes:

> The nature of modern weaponry means that, unless the technology gap is truly enormous (as it was between the US and the Taliban), a determined and competent defender today could make a "forced entry" too costly for any country to contemplate. . . . The West's capacity for military intervention may be a lot less than is sometimes supposed.[147]

Moreover, as proliferators are improving their capabilities, or at least trying to do so, they also seek to extend their ability to threaten our allies further afield as in Europe. And the capabilities of modern weapons increase their owners' ability to strike targets at long range. The reports about Iran and Iraq's projected capabilities point to a desire for the capability to threaten not only each other, or Central Asian governments, or Israel, but also Turkey and even our European allies. Indeed, some of the more prescient Turkish analysts realized this some time ago.[148]

Conclusions: Toward a New U.S. Strategy.

The foregoing discussion outlines only a few ways in which the strategic threat environment is changing, mainly with regard to proliferation. But the instances discussed hardly exhaust the possibilities for proliferation, not to mention other forms of revolutionary transformations that make asymmetrical strategies and their embodied threats more likely. While the associated and new trends in weapons development arguably can be used to justify the new U.S. strategy of preemption and preventive war that is most prominent vis-à-vis Iraq, we need to anticipate as best we can a range of asymmetric strategies employing both old and innovative ways of threatening our assets, forces, and interests. Moreover, we must do so with the certain knowledge that our capabilities, though large and extensive, are also finite; then we must devise new ways and new organizations, including new force packages, to rebuff those threats.

Because the range of asymmetric strategies and threats derived from them that we will face are not confined to nuclear or general WMD threats, the question of conventional force packages and of an appropriate strategy for meeting these threats becomes paramount. Here it is also imperative to remember that the point of asymmetry is the leveraging of capabilities where one has an advantage to achieve strategic objectives. The effects of asymmetric attacks (to use that term) are intended to have either a climactic or cumulative effect upon the enemy, but this does not mean that the purveyors of those attacks can gauge accurately the consequences of their actions. But

what it does mean is that asymmetry is a strategy, and the individual operations or attacks that comprise it are intended towards such strategic objectives. Therefore we must recognize asymmetry, not as an individual action or threat, but as a strategy that is consciously employed to appropriate aims. Consequently, a strategic level response to asymmetric strategies is necessary.

This is especially the case in the light of our wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that highlighted the increasing tendency for our forces to acquire an expeditionary character and the emphasis upon speed of operation.[149] Given the conventionality of the threat that appeared on September 11, albeit one using conventional instruments in wholly innovative ways, it then becomes clear that not only do we need new approaches to force structures, but that we also need new approaches to strategy and the fulfillment of strategic missions to eliminate those threats.

Fortunately, if not fortuitously, the new emphasis on jointness is critical because many of those threats originate in places that cannot be directly accessed by any one service or else individual services cannot sustain forces in that theater on their own for a long engagement.[150] As in Iraq and Afghanistan, effective military action to uproot these threats entails jointly planned and executed operations. No single service can reliably or realistically claim that its contribution alone, no matter how great, can counter asymmetric strategies or the threats that flow from them. This observation applies not only to terrorism and the use of intelligence and police forces on a global scale against that threat. It also applies to counterproliferation operations, and no less critically to ensuring that our forces have direct access to a theater of operations and can overcome enemy anti-access strategies that can include terrorism, WMD, and traditional forms of denial of access to the theater. But beyond those operations, contemporary trends point to the need for forces optimized, as well, for the whole spectrum of conflict, including post-conflict stability operations.

The multiple and concurrent revolutions in strategic affairs since the end of the Cold War have led to the following situation. One important implication has been that Western armed forces, and especially U.S. forces, are expected to possess a range of capabilities

for every conceivable kind of military operation, i.e., full spectrum dominance.[151]

The need to optimize scarce resources under contemporary conditions not only puts a premium on forces' agility and responsiveness to the wide range of possible contingencies that they may encounter. If anything, it puts even more of a burden upon them and their commanders—right up to the heads of state and their policymaking institutions—for mental agility and clear thinking. Although we undoubtedly face threats that are rooted in asymmetric strategies, these threats are not necessarily or even, in fact, asymmetric threats. While lower-level tactical planning must devise specific responses to specific threats emanating from these strategies, our commanders need to keep in mind that we face not only discrete threats, but also enemy strategies. An emphasis by them on the so-called asymmetric threats deflects us from understanding and countering the strategic challenges we face, and reduces the impact of the agility we seek to impart to our armed forces. This monograph does not argue for any specific force structure or sizing packages. Instead, it calls for sharper, clearer thinking so that we are never victims again to the kind of strategic surprise that occurred on September 11. Since there is good reason to suspect that those attacks were intended as a decapitation strike and since such operations are evidently now returning to warfare, as in Iraq, readiness to guard against this kind of threat is essential. Although such a threat is not in and of itself an asymmetric one, it certainly is a strategic one and part of a larger plan of attack against us.

That is the point we have tried to establish. Labeling current and future threats as asymmetric diminishes our understanding of the threat environment. In an age of new threats, new and even revolutionary technologies, and new forms of military operations, the requirement for clear thinking increases commensurately. Information about threats is not enough, notwithstanding our enormous capabilities to gather and exploit it. Indeed, that enhanced capability for data retrieval obligates us to understand our enemy as never before, lest we drown in data. Carefully delineating and understanding the difference between so-called asymmetric threats and asymmetric strategies becomes more important than ever in the

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